



Higher Education Review of Abingdon and Witney College

March 2014

Contents

About this review	1
Key findings.....	2
QAA's judgements about Abingdon and Witney College	2
Good practice	2
Recommendations	2
Affirmation of action being taken	3
Theme: Student Employability.....	3
About Abingdon and Witney College	4
Explanation of the findings about Abingdon and Witney College	6
1 Judgement: Maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards.....	7
2 Judgement: Quality of student learning opportunities.....	14
3 Judgement: Quality of the information produced about its provision.....	30
4 Judgement: Enhancement of student learning opportunities	32
5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability.....	35
Glossary	37

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Abingdon and Witney College. The review took place from 4 to 6 March 2014 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Seth Crofts
- Ms Penny Renwick
- Miss Gemma Stiling (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Abingdon and Witney College and to make judgements as to whether or not its academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. These Expectations are the statements in the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) (the Quality Code)¹ setting out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and of each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

In Higher Education Review the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
 - the setting and maintenance of threshold academic standards
 - the quality of student learning opportunities
 - the information provided about student learning opportunities
 - the enhancement of learning opportunities
- provides a commentary on the selected theme
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the provider is taking or plans to take.

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 7.

In reviewing Abingdon and Witney College the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The [themes](#) for the academic year 2013-14 are Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement and Student Employability,² and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.³ A dedicated page of the website explains the method for [Higher Education Review](#) of higher education providers in England and Northern Ireland⁴ and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents.

¹ The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode.

² Higher Education Review themes: www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/higher-education-review-themes.aspx.

³ QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus.

⁴ Higher Education Review web pages: www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/higher-education-review.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Abingdon and Witney College

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Abingdon and Witney College.

- The maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding body and awarding organisation **meets UK expectations**.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets UK expectations**.
- The quality of the information produced about its provision **meets UK expectations**.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities is **commended**.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at Abingdon and Witney College.

- The systematic approach adopted by the College drives the support and development of effective teaching, learning and assessment across all programmes; for example, the Teaching Skills Academy plays a key role in delivery of an appropriate teaching, learning and assessment strategy (Expectations B3 and B6, Enhancement).
- Significant investment in the professional development of staff is further strengthened by the strong relationship between the College and its degree-awarding body (Expectation B3, Enhancement).
- Strategic direction from the Board of Governors feeds in to relevant and flexible programmes that meet the needs of both employers and students (Enhancement, Expectations B3 and B6).
- An accessible, supportive and responsive ethos empowers students from different backgrounds to develop and succeed (Enhancement, Expectations B3, B4 and B6).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Abingdon and Witney College.

By the start of the next academic year 2014-15:

- adopt a more systematic, consistent approach to engaging employers in programme design, approval and review (Expectations B1 and B8)
- ensure as part of programme approval and review that explicit account is taken and recorded of how learning outcomes align with subject benchmark statements (Expectations B1 and B8)
- develop an explicit internal policy and associated procedures for moderation of assessment of its higher education provision and implement them consistently and systematically across all relevant programmes (Expectation B6)
- ensure that information and guidance provided to students in their handbooks is consistent across all programmes, including references to appeals and complaints (Expectation B9)
- put in place robust, proportionate and consistent procedures for comprehensive and systematic risk assessment of all placement learning, including overseas, that

ensures the quality of students' learning opportunities regardless of context or location (Expectation B10).

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms** the following actions that Abingdon and Witney College is already taking to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to its students.

- Revised procedures for student admission, including the use of new administrative systems (Expectation B2).

Theme: Student Employability

Employability is a theme that runs throughout the College's higher education provision and is a key tenet in the College's mission statement. This is driven at a strategic level through strong employer engagement on the College's Board. The College has built up productive employer relationships over a number of years and is committed to building a skilled workforce for the local economy and beyond. Higher education programmes are designed with employability at their core. Staff are passionate about their contribution to developing employability skills and promoting student success. Students are focused on their own particular work context and speak warmly of the strong employability ethos of their programmes. The College invests in resources that enable students to develop their employability skills, such as the Rural Skills Centre at Common Leys.

Further explanation of the key findings can be found in the handbook available on the QAA webpage explaining [Higher Education Review](#).

About Abingdon and Witney College

Abingdon and Witney College (the College) is a medium-sized further education college located in South-West Oxfordshire, a rural area served by several market towns. Its mission states that the College 'will be recognised as a progressive college that transforms lives and secures futures by providing only the best teaching, education and training'.

Since the last review (Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) in 2009), the College has extended and improved the quality of its estate. It currently operates across five campuses and in several satellite locations. Higher education provision takes place on all three main campuses: a Rural Skills Centre at Common Leys near Witney; the newly updated Witney campus; and the campus at Abingdon which is currently under development. By the end of the academic year 2013-14, the College expects to have 5,300 further education students. Of the 438 students studying at level 4 or above, 318 are following higher education programmes.

Over the last three years, the College, along with other higher education providers in England, has faced the challenge of responding to changes in funding, student support and student number controls. It is emerging from this period with higher education student numbers close to returning to the peak they reached in 2011-12.

The College offers a suite of foundation degrees and bachelor's degrees with honours awarded by Oxford Brookes University (the University) and is a member of the University's Associate College Partnership. The HNC Engineering, which was introduced in September 2013, is awarded by Pearson.

The review team considered the ways in which the College is building on features of good practice identified in the IQER and noted that:

- staff continue rigorously to operate systems of internal moderation, as set out in the operations manuals of the University
- the personal, responsive support offered to students by their tutors remains a strength of the College
- students on equine programmes reported that they place a high value on the opportunities the College provides for national and international student placements
- the College has embedded its methodology for determining teaching hours which provides staff teaching higher education programmes with time for scholarly activity
- students describe an extensive infrastructure that provides highly specialist resources in a diversity of subjects from equine studies to electrical engineering
- some inconsistencies were found within and between student handbooks
- the College has further developed its website with the addition in September 2013 of a 'build-your-own prospectus' function.

The last review considered it advisable that the College:

- develop, in partnership with its awarding bodies and employers, clear documentation in line with the *Code of practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning*.

The 2014 review team confirms that each higher education programme that includes mandatory work placements has an employer's handbook which articulates the specific expectations of employers.

The review team also considered the progress made by the College in addressing a number of recommendations considered desirable at the last review and noted that:

- the approach to annual review is now more evaluative and forward-looking and forward action plans clearly identify key responsibilities and how individual actions will be evaluated
- the College has developed a survey modelled on the National Student Survey which also captures student views on wider issues
- the advanced lecturer role has been further developed through the appointment of the equivalent of six full-time Teaching Skills Academy coaches who are working effectively in their roles to enhance the quality of the College's higher education learning and teaching
- the roles and responsibilities of higher education teaching staff are provided consistently in a checklist format to each individual
- the College has adopted a systematic approach to providing students with appropriate information to enable them to make an informed decision about studying at the College, including provision of open days and applicant days
- the Marketing Manager and the Higher Education Manager oversee the operation of the College's approval process for public information, which is now both thorough and comprehensive.

Explanation of the findings about Abingdon and Witney College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

Terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers have been included in a [brief glossary](#) at the end of this report. A fuller [glossary of terms](#) is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the operational description and [handbook for the review method](#), also on the QAA website.

1 Judgement: Maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards

Expectation (A1): Each qualification (including those awarded through arrangements with other delivery organisations or support providers) is allocated to the appropriate level in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)*.

Quality Code, Chapter A1: The national level

1.1 The qualifications provided by the College adhere to the principles laid out in the University Quality and Standards Handbook. This specifies the external reference points, including the FHEQ, that form the basis of programme approval decisions. Pearson provides the regulatory framework for the HNC in Engineering. These regulatory frameworks for academic standards enable the College to meet Expectation A1 of the Quality Code.

1.2 The review team tested the College's operationalisation of these frameworks by examining documents setting out the quality assurance processes that drive programme approval, monitoring and review; by reviewing programme specifications and reports of programme approval and review events; and by talking to staff and students.

1.3 The evidence demonstrates that the College operates comprehensive and well-documented processes. The University operations manuals bring much of this information into a single point of reference. The College works to the University Assessment Compact, which requires explicit links to be made between assessment and intended learning outcomes. External examiners report on the appropriateness of methods of assessment in the context of intended learning outcomes and affirm these are secure. The review team considers the regulatory infrastructure robust, noting that programme specifications clearly state learning outcomes, modules and assessment for each programme. The University Academic Policy and Quality Office requires that module learning outcomes be appropriately differentiated from level 4 to 6. Module specifications set out in detail the volume of assessment in each module and the learning outcomes being assessed. This information is communicated to students in accessible student handbooks.

1.4 The College is committed to ensuring that students are aware of the requirements of the different levels of study for their programmes. Students report that they have a clear understanding of the learning outcomes to be achieved through assessment and that they regard the volume of assessment as appropriate. Discussions in relation to academic level form a key theme in tutorials with students and are considered as part of the academic skills module, which is used to prepare students to study effectively in higher education. External examiners are required to comment on the appropriateness of the level of the programmes and the review team saw positive responses.

1.5 Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation A1 is met and that risk in this area is low. Specification of learning outcomes ensures that programmes align with the FHEQ and the assessment of students demonstrates learning outcomes have been achieved.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A2): All higher education programmes of study take account of relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements.

Quality Code, Chapter A2: The subject and qualification level

1.6 The College operates quality assurance processes designed to ensure that higher education programmes address relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements. This requirement forms a key theme within approval and review submissions required by the University Academic Policy and Quality Office. These processes enable the College to meet Expectation A2 of the Quality Code.

1.7 The review team evaluated the effectiveness of the College's processes by scrutinising documents setting out programme approval and review processes; reading reports of approval and review events; and by talking to staff, students, employers and placement providers.

1.8 The review team noted that while the foundation degree qualification benchmark statement is considered as part of programme approval and review, it is not consistently highlighted within the documentation. There are, however, obvious strengths in terms of employer engagement, and work-based learning is integral to all the College's foundation degrees. It was clear in meetings that staff have a good working understanding of the essential characteristics of foundation degrees. External examiners are asked to comment explicitly in their annual reports on the appropriateness of work-based learning in the context of the foundation degree qualification benchmark statement. Students provided the review team with real worked examples, indicating they understand how the College's programmes fulfil the purpose of foundation degrees: characteristics cited include flexibility; close relation to industry practices and needs; direct relevance to the workplace; up-to-date programme content, especially in relation to technology; and development of skills that are directly or indirectly transferrable.

1.9 Programme development teams take account of subject benchmark statements, gathering evidence against them as part of programme approval processes. Both programme specifications and student handbooks identify subject benchmark statements relevant to individual programmes. The University's Learning Partnerships Advisory Group scrutinises proposed programmes to ensure relevant external reference points have been addressed. The review team noted that some but not all approval events record discussion concerning subject benchmark statements (see associated recommendation noted under Expectations B1 and B8). External examiners are required to comment explicitly on the relationship between programmes and external reference points and confirm that learning outcomes are appropriate and aligned to subject benchmark statements. However, in meetings staff were unable to provide a clear account of how programmes align with subject benchmark statements.

1.10 Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation A2 is met and risk is low since sufficient account is taken of relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements. Closer attention could be paid, however, to documenting consideration of how foundation degrees align with the foundation degree qualification benchmark statement and how learning outcomes align with relevant subject benchmark statements within programme approval and review processes (see associated recommendation made under Expectations B1 and B8).

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3): Higher education providers make available definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements for a programme of study.

Quality Code, Chapter A3: The programme level

1.11 In accordance with the University Quality and Standards Handbook, the College formally considers and approves programme specifications at approval and periodic review. The University's assessment compact document requires that explicit links be made between assessment and intended learning outcomes. Programme specifications set out the aims and intended learning outcomes for each programme. The HNC Engineering is managed in line with the specification provided by Pearson and operated in the same way as other Pearson programmes within the College. Provision of this information enables the College to meet Expectation A3 of the Quality Code.

1.12 To ascertain how effectively the College manages the production and communication of this information, the review team searched the virtual learning environment; examined a range of documents containing definitive information about programmes including programme specifications, student handbooks and operations manuals; and talked to staff and students.

1.13 Detailed programme specifications containing aims, intended learning outcomes and assessment are provided for students through student handbooks. Programme development teams are responsible for ensuring all documents including the programme specification, student handbook, operations manual and any other material relevant to the programme are consistent with each other. Students reported that they can access their handbooks easily, either via the virtual learning environment or in hard copy, and that they constitute an important source of information about assessment. They told the review team that the information provided enables them to make explicit links between assessment and the intended learning outcomes. Students are briefed in relation to module learning outcomes. Assessment briefs establish a clear link between programme learning outcomes, assessment tasks and student progression. Students are supported in their progression as they move between different levels of academic study in tutorials and classroom sessions.

1.14 Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation A3 is met and risk is low in this area. Information about the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements is managed well and communicated clearly and consistently.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A4): Higher education providers have in place effective processes to approve and periodically review the validity and relevance of programmes.

Quality Code, Chapter A4: Approval and review

1.15 As required by the University Quality and Standards Handbook, the College formally considers and approves programme specifications at approval and periodic review. The nature of the programmes offered means that employers are key stakeholders in determining their validity and relevance. All programmes are formally reviewed annually. These processes enable the College to meet Expectation A4 of the Quality Code.

1.16 The review team tested the effectiveness of these processes by scrutinising documents setting out the way in which programme approval and review should be conducted; by reading reports of approval and review events; and by talking to staff, students, employers and placement providers.

1.17 The University Learning Partnership Advisory Group gathers feedback prior to a review. This process involves market research as well as feedback from external examiners and employers. There is engagement with national and international employers to ensure that programmes maintain currency within the relevant industrial setting. Employers are involved in some approval events but not necessarily every programme. Programmes are reviewed to bring them up to date with changes to external frameworks, such as in early years education.

1.18 Employability and employer perspectives are a clear strength in the design, delivery and evaluation of programmes. Students reported that assessments relate closely to roles in the workplace. There is a variety of employer relationships and, where these are at their strongest, programmes are designed in close partnerships with employers. Students reported that their programmes are very relevant to their chosen careers and were able to give specific examples of how they have taken their learning into the workplace and vice versa. All programmes are formally reviewed annually and reports bring together key information regarding student achievement and external examiner feedback. Employers do not formally contribute to the annual review of programmes (see associated recommendation noted under Expectations B1 and B8).

1.19 Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation A4 is met and that risk in this area is low since effective processes are in place to review the validity and relevance of programmes. Employer feedback concerning the relevance of provision could, however, be incorporated more formally into annual monitoring and consistently used during programme approval and review (see associated recommendation noted under Expectations B1 and B8).

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A5): Higher education providers ensure independent and external participation in the management of threshold academic standards.

Quality Code, Chapter A5: Externality

1.20 External examiners maintain independent oversight of threshold standards and explicitly comment on these in their reports. The appointment of external examiners falls under University regulations and the University and the College share the responsibility. Independent oversight in review is provided through input from employers and external examiners and involvement of external assessors in panel meetings. This approach to externality enables the College to meet Expectation A5 of the Quality Code.

1.21 The review team tested the College's approach by scrutinising regulations and procedures concerning external examiners and documents setting out programme approval and review processes; by reading external examiner reports and reports of approval and review events; and by talking to staff, students, employers and placement providers.

1.22 Programme approval and review incorporates feedback from external examiners and employers. However, review of documentation identified that employers are involved in some but not all approval events. External examiners explicitly comment on the maintenance of threshold standards and alignment with external reference points and their views are considered within annual review reports. External examiners report that academic standards are appropriate. Concerns raised by external examiners are addressed in external examiner report action plans and incorporated into annual review reports. While there are well-embedded and supportive employer relationships, employers are not involved in annual monitoring (see associated recommendation noted under Expectations B1 and B8).

1.23 Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation A5 is met. Since the College ensures robust oversight of academic standards by external examiners and engages extensively with employers, risk is considered low in this area but employers could be engaged more consistently in programme design and approval, monitoring and review.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A6): Higher education providers ensure the assessment of students is robust, valid and reliable and that the award of qualifications and credit are based on the achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

Quality Code, Chapter A6: Assessment of achievement of learning outcomes

1.24 The College complies with the University Assessment Compact which specifies that explicit links must be made between assessment and intended learning outcomes. Programme specifications set out the assessment strategy and assessment diet for each programme together with the intended learning outcomes and assessments for each module. Module assessments are mapped against programme learning outcomes. These frameworks and associated guidance enable the College to meet Expectation A6 of the Quality Code.

1.25 The review team evaluated how effectively the College is putting the frameworks into practice by scrutinising operations manuals, external examiner reports and documents setting out programme approval, monitoring and review processes; by reading reports of approval and review events; and by talking to staff and students.

1.26 The approval process completed by the University makes careful reference to assessment and ensures that assessment is well considered and congruent across programmes. The College's higher education team reviews the effectiveness of assessment when programmes are in operation and modifications are made to the assessment process following University regulations. There is a range of assessment methods which are vocationally contextualised. Staff reported that the University Assessment Compact has been influential in the development of peer assessment.

1.27 The detailed management of assessment is specified within individual programme operations manuals that set out University requirements for assessment, marking and moderation. Assessment briefs are internally verified. External examiners confirm that moderation processes are in place to ensure the reliability of marking. The College participates in cross-College moderation meetings, organised by the University to promote consistency between different partners. External examiners report that this process is effective. Both the College and the University carefully scrutinise external examiner reports, which are discussed at relevant examination committee meetings. External examiners explicitly address the relationship of assessment to intended learning outcomes and comment positively.

1.28 Feedback to students is developmental and based on set criteria that are published in handbooks. Students demonstrated to the review team that they understand assessment requirements, how assessment relates to learning outcomes and how criteria are used to determine grades, and reported that feedback from staff is clear and helpful.

1.29 Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation A6 is met and that risk in this area is low. Assessment of students is robust, enabling them to demonstrate achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards: Summary of findings

1.30 In reaching its judgement about threshold academic standards, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex two of the published handbook.

1.31 All of the applicable Expectations in this area have been met and risk is judged low in each case, with no recommendations arising.

1.32 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the College's degree-awarding body and awarding organisation **meets UK expectations**.

2 Judgement: Quality of student learning opportunities

Expectation (B1): Higher education providers have effective processes for the design and approval of programmes.

Quality Code, Chapter B1: Programme design and approval

2.1 The College, as a delivery organisation, is required to adhere to the University's procedures for programme design and approval. However, initial consideration takes place at programme level before proposals are submitted to the University. Due to the vocational nature of the programmes offered by the College, employers are among the key stakeholders consulted in programme design. The approach the College takes towards programme design and approval enables it to meet Expectation B1 of the Quality Code.

2.2 The review team tested this approach by consulting records of programme design and approval processes and talking to staff, students, employers and placement providers during the review visit.

2.3 The records of programme design and approval activity demonstrate clearly that the College ensures there is a market and a rationale for each new programme. This confirms that each new programme is valid and is designed to meet the needs of students and employers. Employer engagement is demonstrated in the documentation seen and was further evidenced in discussion with employers; however, this did not appear to be the universal experience. While some records of programme approval suggest that the employer perspective is critical to the development of a programme, other examples fail to mention input from employers at all. The review team **recommends** that the College adopt a more systematic, consistent approach to engaging employers in programme design and approval.

2.4 Students are able to contribute to the programme design and approval process, in particular through surveys and during meetings with programme approval panels. From the documentation available it appears that this approach is consistently applied.

2.5 It was noted that while the College states that they align provision to relevant subject benchmark statements, they do not appear to do so consistently in practice. The review team found that some but not all approval events record discussion concerning subject benchmark statements. In meetings with staff it was also apparent that they were not aware how their programmes are meeting relevant subject benchmark statements. Therefore the review team **recommends** that the College ensure, as part of programme approval and review, that explicit account is taken and recorded of how learning outcomes align with subject benchmark statements.

2.6 Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation B1 is met since the College does have in place effective measures and processes for programme design and approval. Risk is considered low in this area but the team felt that greater consistency could be ensured with regard to external consultation and the alignment of learning outcomes with relevant subject benchmark statements.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B2): Policies and procedures used to admit students are clear, fair, explicit and consistently applied.

Quality Code, Chapter B2: Admissions

2.7 The College provides clear admissions criteria that are agreed between the College and the University. Detailed guidance in relation to the operation of admissions processes is provided by the University. Admissions criteria are reviewed during programme approval and review. This information is contained in University operations manuals. Student recruitment, selection and admissions policies are linked to the College's strategic plans, which include commitments to provide higher education for local communities and to work collaboratively with local, regional and national employers. This approach enables the College to meet Expectation B2 of the Quality Code.

2.8 The review team tested the College's practice in relation to admissions by scrutinising guidance provided by the University; browsing information provided for potential students; reading minutes of relevant meetings; and reviewing the experience of admissions in 2013, with staff and current students.

2.9 There was evidence that all staff involved in admissions processes are aware of and understand the College's policies and practices. The College has adopted a systematic approach to providing potential students with appropriate information, enabling them to make informed decisions about studying at the College. Information is delivered at open days and applicant visit days for potential students. Details of the application process and course content are set out on the College's website and are also provided via the higher education prospectus and the UCAS website. The review team found the information clear, accessible and well produced. Students who had used this pre-application information to inform their decisions reported positively on its effectiveness and judged it to be fit for purpose. They reported that it had been supportive when making the transition from an applicant to a higher education student. A comprehensive induction programme has been developed to support this transition across all areas of the provision. Overall, students commented positively on their experiences of recruitment and admission to the College.

2.10 The review team was aware that there had been challenges relating to processing student admissions in 2013 to achieve timely registration with the University and found that there had been a decisive response to these issues. The College has established a project group to redesign the admissions process and engaged an external consultant to work on the redevelopment of admissions systems. The review team considers that the way the College is managing the issues demonstrates an ability to address promptly and effectively operational difficulties that impact on the student experience. Therefore the review team **affirms** the action taken by the College in respect of revised procedures for student admission, including the use of new administrative systems.

2.11 Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation B2 is met as the College is operating its admission policies and procedures fairly and consistently. Risk in this area is low since the College has shown itself capable of dealing with emerging problems in a highly responsive and effective manner.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B3): Higher education providers, working with their staff, students and other stakeholders, articulate and systematically review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices, so that every student is enabled to develop as an independent learner, study their chosen subject(s) in depth, and enhance their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking.

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching*

2.12 The College's strategic vision for its higher education provision involves developing a portfolio of higher education programmes based upon the established subject and professional expertise of the College and focused on the needs of employers and local communities. The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy sets out guidance about teaching observation and staff development. This strategy places much emphasis upon innovative and creative teaching, designed to enable students to develop critical thinking and other independent learning skills. It is supplemented by a Learning, Teaching and Assessment Manual. This approach to learning and teaching enables the College to meet Expectation B3 of the Quality Code.

2.13 The review team evaluated the effectiveness of the College's approach to learning and teaching by consulting the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy and the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Manual; browsing the College virtual learning environment; reviewing staff CVs; holding meetings with staff, including frontline learning support staff working at all levels of the organisational structure; and talking to students about their experiences of learning and teaching at the College.

2.14 The review team noted a range of strategies designed to enhance student learning and promote independence. The College has established a 'Step Up to Study Programme' for prospective applicants who have limited experience of recent study. This helps them work effectively at level 4 and make a smooth learning transition to higher education, with a clear understanding of what will be expected of them.

2.15 The College systematically enables students to plan their own learning and manage the transition between the different academic levels of their programmes. This involves promoting an understanding of learning outcomes and assessment criteria. These are disseminated to students via the well established virtual learning environment, the College website and the student intranet. A proactive and supportive approach is adopted to promote independent learning, which encourages students to plan their own development. The College delivers a range of course information and guides for students via the intranet and virtual learning environment, which support individual learners to achieve programme learning outcomes.

2.16 The review team found that the student learning experience is driven by an effective Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy. Students commented favourably upon teaching and learning within the College. They reported that they receive high quality teaching and were able to give the review team examples of how learning and teaching are linked to industry practice and aid employability. The review team considered that this contributes to two features of good practice identified under Enhancement: first, the way in which strategic direction from the Board of Governors feeds in to relevant and flexible programmes that meet the needs of both employers and students; and second, the accessible, supportive and responsive ethos which empowers students from different backgrounds to develop and succeed.

2.17 The review team found that the College places much emphasis on the recruitment and development of appropriate staff to ensure that the workforce has relevant industry-based experience together with the capacity to become effective teachers and provide

appropriate support for learners. The College has in place well established and universally applied quality assurance processes together with staff development provision designed to support the development of effective teaching. Staff are supported to obtain a minimum level of teaching capability before being allowed to teach independently at the College.

The review team identified as **good practice** the systematic approach adopted by the College which drives the support and development of effective teaching, learning and assessment across all programmes; for example, the Teaching Skills Academy (TSA), which plays a key role in the delivery of an appropriate teaching, learning and assessment strategy. The TSA, consisting of a designated coordinator and a group of experienced teaching staff, has been set up to promote high quality teaching and innovative practice. An extensive Learning, Teaching and Assessment Manual provides helpful guidance for staff including, for example, guidance on practical activities in the classroom. TSA coaches work with staff to deliver formal and informal professional development.

2.18 The TSA team works with individuals and groups of staff to improve their teaching practice and promote a culture of enhancement-focused activity. This can involve formal coaching on a one-to-one basis or scheduled development for larger groups of staff. TSA coaches, together with representatives of the College leadership team, also routinely engage in 'learning walks' during which they drop in informally on teaching activities to offer support and identify good practice and innovation. The review team observed a high degree of commitment to the enhancement of learning and teaching through peer review and effective staff development, which is systematically monitored. They also noted the strength of the College's engagement with the University in relation to staff development; for example, an annual conference for Associate College Partners is highly regarded by staff. Staff appraisal processes are well established and linked to personal development plans, which are jointly agreed between appraiser and appraisee. Action points from teaching observations are followed up and supportive interventions are provided to allow academic staff to develop their practice. The review team identified as **good practice** the significant investment in the professional development of staff which is further strengthened by the strong relationship between the College and its degree-awarding body.

2.19 Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation B3 is met. Staff at all levels conveyed to the review team a strong sense of their investment in and commitment to the College's approach to learning and teaching. Thorough and consistently applied quality assurance processes and the College's commitment to staff development and enhancement ensure that risk is low in this area.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B4): Higher education providers have in place, monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.

Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling student development and achievement

2.20 The College has established a strategic planning and evaluation framework that supports the delivery of student learning opportunities and focuses upon student feedback to enhance the programmes delivered by the College. A Higher Education Strategy provides the framework for development and delivery of higher education within the College. The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy provides guidance for current delivery as well as setting out aspirations for future development of student learning opportunities. The frameworks, strategies and guidance that the College has in place enable it to meet Expectation B4 of the Quality Code.

2.21 The review team considered how effectively these frameworks and strategies were working in practice by examining supporting documentation; reading reports of annual monitoring and periodic review activity; meeting staff, including frontline learning support staff working at all levels of the organisational structure; and talking to students about the ways in which the College enables them to develop and achieve through their studies.

2.22 The review team found that there is a high level of commitment to the strategic development of higher education that is linked to building on specific professional areas in which the College has strength, and also to meeting local, regional and national needs for employers in these areas. Strategies and policies that drive the higher education provision are embedded across all levels of staff involved in the delivery of higher education programmes. The detailed Higher Education Strategy addresses a wide spectrum of issues related to the student experience, for example staff recruitment and student feedback. The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy provides effective guidance for current delivery. The College makes good use of strategic guidance from the University to shape the student experience and determine how they enable student development and achievement. For example, the University's strategy for graduate attributes is applied by the College to shape foundation degrees and provides a strong focus upon student employability. Thorough review of the student experience is effectively managed through detailed and analytical annual and periodic review. Meetings about the field review report, which is co-produced with the University, enable extensive critical review of programme delivery and achieve a systematic review of the student experience.

2.23 The College has a clear staffing strategy to support higher education provision. The Deputy Principal takes executive lead and the Head of Higher Education maintains an overview of operational delivery of student learning opportunities. Academic teams are carefully selected to ensure appropriate subject expertise is available. The College demonstrates a commitment to providing high levels of support to facilitate students' transition through their programmes of study. This objective is supported by a series of well-planned interventions, including an effective induction process, a tutorial programme and engagement from careers advisers to support future employability. Highly effective support is provided for students with additional learning needs, including innovative interventions designed with the input of the mental health charity MIND, to support students with mental health issues. Students informed the review team that they value the responsive and informal approach the College takes to providing additional tutorial support, which is freely available. Students also spoke positively about the College's virtual learning environment, which provides an effective channel of communication from academic staff and from student to student. The review team considered that this illustrates the accessible, supportive and responsive ethos which empowers students from different backgrounds to develop and succeed, which is identified as good practice under Enhancement and referenced in Expectations B3 and B6.

2.24 As part of the College's major commitment to staff development noted under Expectation B3, staff are supported to complete discipline-based higher level qualifications and formal teaching qualifications. A variety of staff development opportunities, provided by the University, are valued by staff. Staff are supported to obtain five days of professional refreshment each year. The review team heard that this opportunity was highly valued by academic staff who were able to demonstrate how this is enhancing their teaching.

2.25 The College takes a strategic approach to allocating learning resources, which includes consideration of the specialist needs of each programme and the academic skills required to deliver each subject area. Students reported that they consider the resources available to support their programmes appropriate and current in relation to specialist industry requirements. Extensive library resources are also available on the local campus of the University.

2.26 Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation B4 is met and risk is low in this area since the College has a highly systematic approach to planning, resourcing, managing and monitoring the effective delivery of programmes in a dynamic professional environment focused on enhancement.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B5): Higher education providers take deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.

Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student engagement

2.27 The College has in place an established system of student representation which involves elected student representatives participating as full members of various deliberative forums including programme committees, annual review meetings and field meetings. The College gathers feedback on the student experience, including, for example, end-of-module evaluations, mid-module evaluations and induction surveys. These arrangements enable the College to meet Expectation B5 of the Quality Code.

2.28 The review team tested how well these arrangements were working in practice by studying reports of annual monitoring and periodic review activity; reading the minutes of meetings where student representatives were present; and talking to a wide range of staff and students about the effectiveness of the arrangements to make sure the student voice is heard at the College.

2.29 The College has established an effective partnership with students that is characterised by a variety of formal and informal communication mechanisms. Student representatives are formally elected and supported in their role through informal input from course leaders. Feedback from student evaluations and discussions at field meetings form a specific part of the annual review process, which ensures the student voice is formally recorded during annual monitoring and review of academic delivery. Students consider there are effective mechanisms in place to support feedback from the student body. They reported that there is an open dialogue between students and academic staff that results in prompt, informal resolution of any concerns raised by students. Overall, the review team found evidence of a joint commitment between students and academic staff to engage in critical review of programmes to achieve enhancement.

2.30 The College has evaluated the effectiveness of its approaches to ensuring that the student voice is heard and has identified a strategy to establish more structured feedback from the higher education community. The College has been working closely with Students' Union representatives from the University to establish a local presence for the Students' Union onsite. This would provide support for students to engage fully with representatives of the Students' Union and benefit from closer links with the University student body including provision of formal training for student representatives. Students expressed support for this proposal in meetings with the review team, although they also expressed broad satisfaction with the current arrangements for managing the student voice. This initiative has the potential to enhance student feedback and further develop the identity of the College students as higher education students.

2.31 Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation B5 is met and that risk in this area is low since a highly effective collaborative partnership has been established between students and academic staff who deliver individual programmes, characterised by openness on the part of academic teams who are seen by students as very responsive to feedback.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B6): Higher education providers ensure that students have appropriate opportunities to show they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the award of a qualification or credit.

Quality Code, Chapter B6: Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning

2.32 The College complies with the University Assessment Compact, which clearly states the University's requirements for assessment and feedback. Programme specifications and handbooks set out the intended learning outcomes for each programme and module. Guidance on the setting, marking and moderation of assessments is provided within University operations manuals. The HNC Engineering follows Pearson guidelines and is operated in the same way as other Pearson programmes within the College. By these means, the College is enabled to meet Expectation B6 of the Quality Code.

2.33 The review team tested the effectiveness of the College's approach to assessment by searching the virtual learning environment; examining various documents, including programme specifications, student handbooks, University operations manuals and College guidelines; and talking to key staff, students, employers and placement providers about their experiences of assessment and feedback.

2.34 Staff were able to demonstrate to the review team that they were aware of the University Assessment Compact and reported that they were offered training days by the University to improve their understanding of assessment within a higher education context. This training exemplifies the systematic approach adopted by the College that drives the support and development of effective teaching, learning and assessment across all programmes and which has been identified as good practice under Expectation B3.

2.35 In meetings with students it was evident that they had a sophisticated understanding of what was expected of them from each assessment and that student handbooks set out information about assessment clearly. The review team considered that this exemplifies the accessible, supportive and responsive ethos of the College that empowers students from different backgrounds to develop and succeed, which is identified as good practice under Enhancement and referenced in Expectations B3 and B4.

2.36 Students and employers all emphasised the relevance of assignments to real-world applications. There was evidence that this emphasis on employability is central to the College's mission and is being driven by the vision of the Principal and the Board of Governors. The review team considered that this demonstrates the strategic direction of the Board of Governors which feeds in to relevant and flexible programmes that meet the needs of both employers and students, which is identified as good practice under Enhancement and referenced in Expectation B3.

2.37 Assessment briefs are internally verified. Moderation of assignments takes place between all partner colleges of the University to ensure consistency. External examiners report that they are satisfied with the moderation process, are assured of the reliability of the marking, and are confident that assessments enable students to demonstrate that they have met the intended learning outcomes. Staff whom the review team met did not, however, provide a consistent account of how the College's Policy for Verification, Standards Moderation and Quality Assurance of Assessment has been systematically embedded within the College's higher education programmes. Therefore the review team **recommends** that the College develop an explicit internal policy and associated procedures for moderation of assessment of its higher education provision and implement them consistently and systematically across all relevant programmes.

2.38 Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation B6 is met as students have appropriate opportunities to show they have achieved their intended learning outcomes. Several features of good practice were noted in relation to this area. Although an overarching internal policy for moderation of higher education programmes is lacking, the review team concludes that risk was low since internal moderation does take place and cross-College moderation has been identified as a strength by external examiners.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B7): Higher education providers make scrupulous use of external examiners.

Quality Code, Chapter B7: External examining

2.39 External examiners for franchised programmes are appointed by the University and follow the regulations set out by the University. Pearson is responsible for appointing an external verifier for the HNC Engineering programme. External examiners are involved in the approval of all examination papers and ensure that intended learning outcomes are assessed appropriately. Their reports are integrated into the programme review process. Action plans are then devised in light of comments raised and a letter sent to external examiners in response. The use made of external examiners enables the College to meet Expectation B7 of the Quality Code.

2.40 The review team considered the use made of external examiners by searching the College's virtual learning environment; reading a range of external examiner reports and records of annual monitoring processes; and talking to key staff and students, including student representatives, about the sharing of external examiner reports with students.

2.41 The review team was able to confirm that students on all higher education programmes at the College have access to the most recent external examiner reports via the virtual learning environment. When asked about external examiners and external examiner reports in meetings, however, some students were unaware that they had access to this information.

2.42 Overall, the review team concludes that the College has met Expectation B7. Risk is low in this area as documentation supplied to the review team indicates that the College has a robust external examining system and that external examiner comments consistently form part of the annual review process. Practice could be strengthened, however, by ensuring that all students are made aware of the availability of external examiner reports.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B8): Higher education providers have effective procedures in place to routinely monitor and periodically review programmes.

Quality Code, Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review

2.43 The College, as a delivery organisation, is required to adhere to University procedures for monitoring quality and standards as set out in the Quality and Standards Handbook and in the operations manual for each franchised programme. Each programme is monitored annually and is subject to periodic review every five years. In most cases, periodic programme review and periodic partnership review of the College by the University occur at the same time. Periodic review considers the validity of a programme and can secure its continuation. Pearson is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the HNC Engineering and makes decisions about amending the individual units that comprise the programme. The approach the College takes towards programme monitoring and periodic review enables it to meet Expectation B8 of the Quality Code.

2.44 The review team tested this approach by examining documents setting out the way in which annual monitoring and periodic review should be conducted, consulting records of programme monitoring and periodic review, and talking to both staff and students during the review visit.

2.45 Procedures for annual monitoring and periodic review, supplied to the review team, are extremely detailed and ensure that processes are informed by data from all programme stakeholders. Programmes are reviewed annually and the amount of evidence used to inform this process is substantial: recruitment and retention data, survey results and external examiner reports are all included.

2.46 Employers' opinions are sought through employer engagement projects, surveys and market research. However, during the meeting with employers the review team heard that they are not formally involved in review processes. Therefore, as stated in Expectation B1, the review team recommends that the College adopt a more systematic, consistent approach to engaging employers in programme review.

2.47 The student voice is heard within annual monitoring and periodic review processes both through surveys and student attendance at programme committees where annual reviews are discussed.

2.48 As indicated under Expectation B1, the review team noted that while the College states that they align provision to relevant subject benchmark statements, they do not appear to do so consistently in practice. The review team found that some but not all periodic review events record discussion concerning subject benchmark statements. In meetings with staff it was also apparent that they were not aware how their programmes meet relevant subject benchmark statements. Therefore, as stated in Expectation B1, the review team recommends that the College ensure, as part of periodic review, that explicit account is taken and recorded of how learning outcomes align with subject benchmark statements.

2.49 Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation B8 is met since the College does have in place effective measures and processes for annual monitoring and periodic review. Risk is considered low in this area but greater consistency could be ensured with regard to external consultation and reviewing the alignment of learning outcomes with relevant subject benchmark statements.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B9): Higher education providers have fair, effective and timely procedures for handling students' complaints and academic appeals.

Quality Code, Chapter B9: Complaints and student appeals

2.50 The College has its own internal appeals and complaints procedures which students must follow in the first instance regardless of degree-awarding body or awarding organisation. The complaints and appeals procedures are provided within programme handbooks. All complaints are logged with the Senior Management Team and higher education-specific complaints are reviewed by the Higher Education Manager. The arrangements enable the College to meet Expectation B9 of the Quality Code.

2.51 The review team evaluated the effectiveness of the arrangements for handling complaints and appeals by searching the virtual learning environment for information; reading a range of student handbooks, reports on annual monitoring and minutes of meetings; and talking to students and staff about their experiences in lodging and handling complaints and appeals.

2.52 Complaints procedures are clear and made available to students via their handbooks and the virtual learning environment. The College has effective procedures in place for appropriate staff to review and escalate complaints if necessary. The review team noted that the complaints log records that the College has received only one higher education complaint. Discussions with students confirmed that this is testament to the supportive culture of the College identified as good practice under Enhancement and noted under Expectations B3 and B6, as opposed to a lack of awareness. The College has not received any appeals from students either. The review team noted that arrangements for appeals are not as clear as those for complaints. While a procedure exists and is made available to students, it remained unclear to the review team how appeals would be reported and reviewed. Discussion with students indicated, however, that the absence of appeals should not be attributed to lack of clarity but to the fact that students have had no cause to invoke appeals procedures. This forms part of the ethos that has been mentioned earlier as good practice. Students were clear about who they would contact to raise an issue. Staff reported that appeals, if received, would be reviewed and discussed at programme committees.

2.53 The review team discovered some inconsistencies in the information provided to students about complaints and appeals. The version of the complaints procedure presented to the review team appeared in one other student handbook but was not included in the remaining handbooks. Some student handbooks and appeals guidance supplied to the review team indicate that students must follow University procedures, and do not mention an internal appeals process. Other student handbooks describe an internal appeals procedure, the existence of which staff confirmed in a meeting with the review team. The review team was concerned that such inconsistent information could cause confusion among students. Therefore the review team **recommends** that the College ensure that information and guidance provided to students in their handbooks is consistent across all programmes, including references to appeals and complaints.

2.54 Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation B9 is met since the College has in place an appropriate appeals and complaints procedure, should it need to be used. Risk is low in this area because of the College's proactive approach to dealing swiftly with emerging difficulties. The College could nevertheless improve its practice by ensuring consistency of information and being clear on how they would monitor and review appeals, should any be lodged.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B10): Degree-awarding bodies take ultimate responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, irrespective of where these are delivered or who provides them. Arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with organisations other than the degree-awarding body are implemented securely and managed effectively.

Quality Code, Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others

2.55 The College is a delivery organisation for programmes franchised to it by the University and for a Pearson HNC Engineering programme. As such, the College is not ultimately responsible for the management of academic standards and the quality of student learning opportunities. The College does, however, have responsibility for the effective management of its arrangements with employers and placement providers where learning opportunities within the work environment constitute an integral aspect of the student's programme. The College provides handbooks for employers and placement providers designed to ensure that they understand the programme the student is undertaking, their respective roles and responsibilities and how they can support the student. The approach taken towards the quality assurance of placement learning enables the College to meet Expectation B10 of the Quality Code.

2.56 The review team tested the College's approach to the quality assurance of placements by reading the handbooks for employers and placement providers and talking to staff, students, employers and placement providers about their experiences of learning in the workplace.

2.57 Across the provision, several programme delivery models are evident, ranging from day release for students employed in engineering, business or early years, through to a placement model for students studying animal health and welfare or equine science. Students confirmed that they were made aware at the point of application that they would be expected either to be in employment or to take part in work placements to be eligible for their programme. Some also indicated that this had had a major influence on their decision to come to the College. The College has a very flexible approach to placements. Students explained that they could either complete their placement in a block or opt to attend one day a week. Some were taking the opportunity to arrange a placement abroad.

2.58 Employer/placement provider handbooks specify the paperwork that needs to be completed to set up an arrangement. Oxfordshire County Council undertakes health and safety checks on behalf of the College for potential placement providers. This arrangement covers any placement within the UK, but not international placements. Some staff whom the review team met expressed the view that the College does not consider itself responsible for the quality assurance of arrangements 'overseas' or those involving paid employment. As these arrangements form an integral part of students' programmes, the review team takes the view that all staff should be made aware of the College's responsibility for ensuring that they are fit for purpose. Therefore the review team **recommends** that the College put in place robust, proportionate and consistent procedures for comprehensive and systematic risk assessment of all placement learning, including overseas, that ensures the quality of students' learning opportunities regardless of context or location.

2.59 Employers whom the review team met were satisfied with their relationships with the College. They reported that the College sets a framework for placements but still allows the employer to supervise the student as though they were a full member of the team, and that the support provided by the College is good.

2.60 Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation B10 is met. Risk is considered low in this area because arrangements with employers and placement providers are generally managed effectively. The review team considers, however, that the College should

encompass within its quality assurance processes the relatively small number of cases where students arrange placements overseas or where the arrangement involves paid employment.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B11): Research degrees are awarded in a research environment that provides secure academic standards for doing research and learning about research approaches, methods, procedures and protocols. This environment offers students quality of opportunities and the support they need to achieve successful academic, personal and professional outcomes from their research degrees.

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research degrees*

2.61 The College does not offer research degrees.

Quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.62 In reaching its judgement about the quality of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex two of the published handbook.

2.63 All applicable Expectations have been met and risk is judged low in each case. Five recommendations were made in relation to a total of five Expectations. Two of the recommendations apply to two Expectations while each of the remaining three applies to a single Expectation. A sixth Expectation gave rise to an affirmation. Two features of good practice were identified in relation to this area, both of which apply to several Expectations and further contribute to the judgement on Enhancement of student learning opportunities. Two further features of good practice identified under Enhancement were exemplified by several Expectations in this area.

2.64 The two recommendations arising from the Expectations about programme design, approval, monitoring and review indicate improvements that could be made to processes and procedures which the review team considered to be operating sufficiently well at the time of the review visit. The actions recommended will not require or result in major change to structures, processes or practices. The recommendations concerning internal moderation, information about complaints and appeals and the quality assurance of placements are also made in the context of arrangements that were operating effectively at the time of the review visit. The actions recommended will make good some minor oversights enabling the College to meet the Expectations more fully.

2.65 The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities **meets UK expectations**.

3 Judgement: Quality of the information produced about its provision

Expectation (C): UK higher education providers produce information for their intended audiences about the higher education they offer that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

Quality Code, Part C: Information about higher education provision

3.1 The College provides information to prospective students through its website, prospectus and key information sets on the Unistats website. Current students are able to access the virtual learning environment, which holds electronic versions of student handbooks and external examiner reports. To ensure consistency of information, the College has an approval process for publishing public information about its higher education provision. The operations manuals for programmes franchised by the University set out clear protocols for the management and review of published information. All materials must be approved by the University before publication. These procedures and protocols enable the College to meet Expectation C of the Quality Code.

3.2 The review team tested the effectiveness of the College's management of information about its higher education provision by exploring with staff how they put the protocols into practice and asking students whether they regard the information they receive as fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

3.3 Staff were able to explain to the review team how they would go about getting the higher education prospectus approved, demonstrating that the protocols work in practice and that sufficient checks are in place to assure the quality of the information. During periodic review, operations manuals and student handbooks are considered to be 'primary documentation' and are discussed as part of the process. Student handbooks are also considered as part of annual monitoring and are themselves reviewed within the process. This appears to be a very robust system, designed to ensure that information within handbooks is fit for purpose and trustworthy. However, this process does not ensure consistency across handbooks, as each is considered in isolation. Inconsistencies in relation to information about complaints procedures in student handbooks were also noted under Expectation B9. The College could strengthen the quality of its information for current students by addressing this matter.

3.4 Various forms of data are currently used to inform the College's programme monitoring and review processes including recruitment, retention, achievement and graduate employment. Student support is a strength of the College, with evidence that both staff and students are confident that learners' needs are being met. This could be further enhanced by gathering and analysing data that measures the relative success of specific groups of students and routinely using such data in programme monitoring and review.

3.5 Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation C is met. Risk in this area is low as the College has in place appropriate measures to ensure that information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The College could improve further by ensuring consistency of information across programmes, especially within programme handbooks. Data specifically about special groups of students could also help evidence the good work the College is doing around student support.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Quality of the information produced about its provision: Summary of findings

3.6 In reaching its judgement about the quality of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex two of the published handbook.

3.7 The Expectation in this area was met and risk was judged low with no recommendations arising.

3.8 The review team concludes that the quality of information produced about the College's provision **meets UK expectations**.

4 Judgement: Enhancement of student learning opportunities

Expectation (Enhancement): Deliberate steps are being taken at provider level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities.

4.1 The College adopts and embeds a systematic approach to drive the enhancement of student learning opportunities across all programmes.

4.2 The review team tested the College's approach to enhancement by examining relevant strategies and policies that underpin enhancement by reviewing evidence that demonstrates employer liaison in action; and by engaging in discussion with a diverse group of staff, students, employers and placement providers.

4.3 The review team found that clear strategic direction is provided by the Board of Governors, the Principal and the Senior Management Team. This drives the development and enhancement of relevant and flexible programmes that meet the needs of both employers and students. The Higher Education Strategy and the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy both provide strong direction for the delivery and enhancement of higher education at the College, including a strategic view on staffing and staff development. The College has successfully linked these key strategic imperatives to unite staff at all levels to drive a culture of enhancement that emphasises excellence in learning and teaching. This culture supports students in becoming successful and challenges them to achieve their full potential. Evidence of this commitment is apparent among staff across all levels of the academic and student services teams. The review team identified as **good practice**, already referenced under Expectations B3 and B6, the way in which strategic direction from the Board of Governors feeds into relevant and flexible programmes that meet the needs of both employers and students.

4.4 The College has carefully considered and implemented a range of strategies that allow students to become partners in learning. This relates to the careful preparation of students to step up to study at level 4, the promotion of key information about the expectations that are placed on students through learning outcomes, and the need to develop an explicit understanding of the requirements for progression and academic professional achievement. The review team found that these efforts to engage students in an effective learning partnership represented further evidence of systematic enhancement.

4.5 Enhancement is embedded in the range of quality processes as a matter of principle. The College was able to illustrate for the review team how it ensures that all its policies, strategies and practices serve constantly to enhance student learning opportunities. The review team identified as **good practice**, already referenced under Expectations B3 and B6, the College's accessible, supportive and responsive ethos, which empowers students from different backgrounds to develop and succeed.

4.6 The review team considered that a feature of good practice, identified under Expectation B3 and referenced in Expectation B6, also makes a significant contribution to the enhancement of learning opportunities. The systematic approach adopted by the College drives the support and development of effective teaching, learning and assessment across all programmes. This is exemplified by the TSA, which plays a key role in delivering an appropriate teaching, learning and assessment strategy. The College has made a major commitment to supporting and enhancing the delivery of high quality teaching through the TSA team, whose work is described in more detail under Expectation B3. There is evidence of a high degree of commitment to the enhancement of teaching and development of innovative practice at all levels of the organisation and a strong sense of focus on enhancement through the University's Associate College Partnership.

4.7 The review team found evidence of the College's commitment to provide industry-relevant higher education provision and to build enhancement strategies upon effective stakeholder engagement. Employers provide key inputs into student learning opportunities with some employers assisting in the design and development of programmes. Employers described strong relationships with the College and indicated that the College is highly focused upon producing graduates who meet their needs. Some long-term relationships have been built with major employers who report that graduates from the College have developed to become highly effective in their roles within their companies.

4.8 The College has made a major commitment to staff development, described in detail under Expectation B3. Staff indicated to the review team how highly they value the opportunities provided and were able to offer examples of how they have enhanced the quality of their teaching. The review team heard how the College responded to student feedback, indicating that they preferred when staff could talk from their own experience of the workplace by supporting staff to undertake five days of professional refreshment each year. Staff are also offered support to complete discipline-based higher level qualifications and formal teaching qualifications. A significant contribution to staff development is provided by the University. This emphasises the higher education context and is highly valued by staff. The review team considered that the College's significant investment in the professional development of staff, which is further strengthened by the strong relationship between the College and its degree-awarding body and was identified as good practice under Expectation B3, also makes an important contribution to the enhancement of learning opportunities.

4.9 Overall, the review team concludes that the Expectation concerning enhancement is met and the risk in this area low, since the College has been able to bring together a cohesive vision for the development of its higher education provision and deploy a strong mechanism for staff development through its TSA and links with industry. In addition, strong partnerships with the student body, local and regional employers and the University have resulted in enhancement becoming an embedded philosophy rather than a discrete strategy.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.10 In reaching its judgement about the enhancement of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex two of the published handbook.

4.11 The Expectation in this area was met and risk was judged low with no recommendations arising. Two features of good practice were identified in relation to this area and a further two identified under quality of learning opportunities were considered to make a significant contribution to this area. The College has a cohesive vision for enhancing its higher education provision which is embedded at all levels and in all its plans. Staff and students benefit from a substantial investment in the professional development of staff. Students are engaged in an effective learning partnership. The College's accessible, supportive and responsive ethos empowers students from different backgrounds to develop and succeed.

4.12 The review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities is **commended**.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

5.1 Employability is a theme that runs throughout the College's higher education provision and is a key tenet in the College's mission statement. This is driven at a strategic level through strong employer engagement on the College's Board. The College is supported in its mission through the framework provided by the University's Graduate Attributes, which apply to all programmes, and the explicit attention given to employer engagement in the University's regulatory infrastructure. External examiners confirm in their reports that programmes and associated assessments are industry-related.

5.2 The College has built up its employer relationships over a number of years and employers confirmed that the College is responsive and supportive in doing their part, helping to build a skilled workforce for the local economy and beyond. The College undertook an employer engagement project which gathered feedback from a range of employers nationally and internationally. This project involved staff and student representatives engaging with employers to gather their views. These have been fed back via College staff development events. This project has, for example, underpinned changes in programme delivery in Animal Health and Welfare.

5.3 With the exception of the Foundation Diploma in Life Sciences, where it would not be appropriate, all of the higher education programmes are designed with employability at their core. Across the provision, several different programme delivery models are evident, ranging from day release for students employed in engineering, business or in early years, through to a placement model for students studying animal health and welfare or equine science. The nature of the relationships with key employers takes account of these different arrangements. In meeting with employers the review team learned that relationships between employers and the College work well and that programmes are delivering employees who meet the needs of their respective workplaces. Some employers assist in the design and development of programmes.

5.4 Staff commitment to the employability and skills agenda was evident in every meeting held during the review. Staff are passionate about their contribution to developing employability skills and promoting student success. This commitment is recognised by the students and employers. The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy states that all staff teaching vocational subjects are expected to be vocationally competent and to update their skills on a regular basis. Staff development policies enable staff to spend time in industry and there is evidence that staff are maintaining close industry relationships. Every member of staff can spend two days in industry per year and other arrangements can be made as necessary. Staff speak positively about the value of this time and are able to explain how it has directly influenced the curriculum. Students report that they are able to use their tutors for advice and guidance about jobs and career development. The College promotes employability further through industry visits and outside speakers.

5.5 The College invests in resources that enable students to develop their employability skills, such as the Rural Skills Centre at Common Leys, and these are appreciated by students. Senior staff articulated the strategic planning process that considers investment in additional vocational facilities. Where resources are highly specialised, arrangements are made to access them in the workplace, for example engineering staff and students spoke about their access to high voltage equipment.

5.6 In meetings, all students were focused on their own particular work context and spoke warmly of the strong employability ethos that was evident in all aspects of their programmes. This was further confirmed by some of the employers whom the review team met who were previous graduates of the College. Students find the work-study relationship mutually beneficial, adding to their confidence in both environments and securing work skills by cementing prior knowledge and foregrounding the theory that lies behind it.

Employers are involved in work-related projects and some employers now assist with programme delivery.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 27 to 29 of the [Higher Education Review handbook](#).

If you require formal definitions of other terms please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality: www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality.

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer **Glossary** on the QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary.

Academic standards

The standards set by **degree-awarding bodies** for their courses (programmes and modules) and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

Award

A qualification, or academic credit, conferred in formal recognition that a student has achieved the intended **learning outcomes** and passed the assessments required to meet the academic standards set for a **programme** or unit of study.

Blended learning

Learning delivered by a number of different methods, usually including face-to-face and e-learning (see **technology enhanced or enabled learning**).

Credit(s)

A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education **programmes of study**, expressed as numbers of credits at a specific level.

Degree-awarding body

A UK higher education provider (typically a university) with the power to award degrees, conferred by Royal Charter, or under Section 76 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, or under Section 48 of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992, or by Papal Bull, or, since 1999, granted by the Privy Council on advice from QAA (in response to applications for taught degree awarding powers, research degree awarding powers or university title).

Distance learning

A course of study that does not involve face-to-face contact between students and tutors but instead uses technology such as the internet, intranets, broadcast media, CD-ROM and video, or traditional methods of correspondence - learning 'at a distance'. See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award

The granting of separate awards (and certificates) for the same **programme** by two **degree-awarding bodies** who have jointly delivered the programme of study leading to them. See also **multiple award**.

e-learning

See **technology enhanced or enabled learning**.

Enhancement

The process by which higher education providers systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported. It is used as a technical term in our review processes.

Expectations

Statements in the **Quality Code** that set out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

Flexible and distributed learning

A programme or module that does not require the student to attend classes or events at particular times and locations. See also **distance learning**.

Framework

A published formal structure. See also **framework for higher education qualifications**.

Framework for higher education qualifications

A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education providers in maintaining academic standards. QAA publishes the following frameworks: *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and *The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland* (FHEQIS).

Good practice

A process or way of working that, in the view of a QAA review team, makes a particularly positive contribution to a higher education provider's management of academic standards and the quality of its educational provision. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.

Learning opportunities

The provision made for students' learning, including planned study, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support, and resources (such as libraries and information systems, laboratories or studios).

Learning outcomes

What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning.

Multiple awards

An arrangement where three or more **degree-awarding bodies** together provide a single jointly delivered **programme** (or programmes) leading to a separate **award** (and separate certification) of each awarding body. The arrangement is the same as for **dual/double awards**, but with three or more awarding bodies being involved.

Operational definition

A formal definition of a term, establishing exactly what QAA means when using it in reviews and reports.

Programme (of study)

An approved course of study that provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

Programme specifications

Published statements about the intended **learning outcomes** of programmes of study, containing information about teaching and learning methods, support and assessment methods, and how individual units relate to levels of achievement.

Public information

Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

Quality Code

Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is the UK-wide set of **reference points** for higher education providers (agreed through consultation with the higher education community, and published by QAA), which states the **Expectations** that all providers are required to meet.

Reference points

Statements and other publications that establish criteria against which performance can be measured.

Subject benchmark statement

A published statement that sets out what knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills are expected of those graduating in each of the main subject areas (mostly applying to bachelor's degrees), and explains what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity.

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)

Learning that is delivered or supported through the use of technology.

Threshold academic standard

The minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student has to demonstrate to be eligible for an academic **award**. Threshold academic standards are set out in the national **frameworks** and **subject benchmark statements**.

Virtual learning environment (VLE)

An intranet or password-only interactive website (also referred to as a platform or user interface) giving access to **learning opportunities** electronically. These might include such resources as course handbooks, information and reading lists; blogs, message boards and forums; recorded lectures; and/or facilities for online seminars (webinars).

Widening participation

Increasing the involvement in higher education of people from a wider range of backgrounds.

QAA762 - R3720 - May 14

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2014
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB

Tel: 01452 557 000

Email: enquiries@qaa.ac.uk

Website: www.qaa.ac.uk

Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786